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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Analysis of Cuban Military Intervention in
Angola and Ethiopia

Key Judgments

In this paper, we have tried to piece together the definitive story of Cuba's actions in Angola and Ethiopia. Enough time has elapsed since the high point of conflict in both theaters for us to profit from a re-examination of some of our earlier hypotheses, to take into consideration additional information [redacted] and to put Cuba's foreign adventures into better perspective. In general, our research has turned up few surprises, but some of our earlier judgments that were a bit tentative have been strengthened [redacted]

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This Executive Summary is a precis of a longer paper to be issued separately. It was prepared in the Cuba Analytic Center, Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis. Questions and comments may be addressed to the authors, [redacted]

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Cuba decided to intervene in Angola and Ethiopia for these reasons:

- The conviction of Cuban leaders that the US, with its recent Vietnam experience, was not prepared to intervene militarily in Africa as a counterweight to Cuba.
- The serious dedication of Castro to worldwide revolution and the cause of "international proletarianism." Castro undoubtedly saw military assistance to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and later to the Ethiopian government as a way to enhance his and Cuba's revolutionary credentials, which had been somewhat tarnished by Cuban failures in Latin America in the 1960s.
- The fact that Cuba was "invited in" by a group that had the trappings of legitimacy (Angola) and a "progressive" Third World government (Ethiopia).
- The Cuban perception that by giving substantive support to Soviet goals in Angola and Ethiopia, Cuba would be ensured of continued Soviet economic assistance and would perhaps receive modern equipment for its military inventory.
- The calculation that Cuban intervention would guarantee victory for the MPLA and the Ethiopians.
- The concern among the Cuban leadership that the current generation of Cuban youth had not experienced its own "trial by fire," that it had not paid its revolutionary dues. Active involvement in Angola would help guarantee the continuation of the revolutionary process in Cuba itself.

Cuba's interventions in Africa demonstrate that Castro's leadership style continues the pattern of daring and bold actions that has characterized his administration since the early 1950s.

- Despite many setbacks in the past, Castro has consistently approached major decisions as a compulsive man of action.

- The hard liners in the leadership are more influential than those who argue for less stridency around the world.
- The success of the interventions has strengthened the military's voice in policy-making decisions in Havana.

The Cubans' behavior in Angola and Ethiopia gives us a framework for predicting their future policies.

- Cuba has no "Grand Design" for Africa; it will exploit targets of opportunity as part of Castro's long-held strategy of causing maximum difficulties for the US and other "imperialist powers." But Havana clearly sees southern Africa as a promising arena for successful meddling, and the presence of sizable Cuban military contingents in Angola and Ethiopia makes the use of Cuban troops elsewhere in Africa a realistic option.
- Although so far Havana and Moscow have been following complementary policies in Africa, Havana's commitment to revolutionary actions is likely eventually to conflict with Moscow's more pragmatic needs and interests.
- When competing claims arise, such as whether to improve relations with the US or to support revolutionary states or groups in the Third World, Havana will sacrifice better relations with Washington.

The Cubans have yet to suffer the kinds of casualties that would give them pause in considering future interventionist actions. They have paid some political costs--especially in the nonaligned movement--but on balance, their image in southern Africa has been significantly strengthened. Havana may well undertake tactical shifts, such as reducing its troop strength abroad, to undercut Third World critics and minimize domestic concern. In the long run, however, the major thrust of Cuban foreign policy is likely to be a continued commitment to international activism.

Cuban Involvement in Africa: Background

Cuban foreign policy during the first nine years of the Castro regime--1959 through 1967--concentrated primarily on promoting revolutionary movements bent on repeating the Cuban experience, i.e., attaining power through violent revolution.

Under certain conditions, however, Havana also aided incumbent governments.

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Cuban military support to legitimate governments drew far fewer headlines and less international reaction than did Cuban paramilitary support for groups subverting legitimate governments. Moreover, world attention focused mainly on Cuban activities in Latin America despite the far greater investment in Cuban personnel in Africa than in Latin America.

When the sterility of its policy of fomenting revolution abroad finally became obvious to Havana, the Castro regime shifted gears and entered a period in which its main aim was to overcome Cuba's isolation by expanding ties with legitimate governments. Support for revolutionary movements was by no means abandoned, but Havana revised its criteria and became much more selective in deciding which rebel groups to back. It was in this policy setting that the Cuban leadership made its initial decision in mid-1975 to intervene in Angola.

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The Process

To understand how Cuba came to provide mass support to the MPLA, and later to Ethiopia, knowledge of the Cuban decisionmaking apparatus is needed. This is not easy to determine in a closed society, so the appraisal that follows must be to some degree speculative.

Decisionmaking in Cuba has had a personalistic bent over the last 19 years, with President Fidel Castro taking an active and deeply personal role in the process. Because Castro regards foreign policy as his particular domain, the bureaucratic organs that handle foreign affairs in Western countries and play a large role in formulating foreign policy hold very little weight in Cuba. Fidel, however, has increasingly listened to advice from other members of the Cuban leadership and from experienced foreign leaders and officials as well.

Three main bureaucratic interest groups make up the Cuban power structure today: the technocrats, the "raulistas," and the "fidelistas."

- The technocrats-pragmatists--primarily concerned with the efficient running of the Cuban economy and with the acquisition of needed industrial goods from the West and the US market--have as their chief spokesman Carlos Rafael Rodriguez.
- The "raulistas"--the top echelons of the military-security establishment and those who also seek close collaboration with Moscow--are led by Castro's younger brother, Raul.
- The "fidelistas"--close associates of Fidel's from the days of the guerrilla struggle against Batista--tend to be the most nationalistic and--along with the "raulistas"--the most aggressively anti-US of the regime's hierarchy. Osmani Cienfuegos and Juan Almeida are representative spokesmen.

The military has had an increasingly large role in decisions on Cuban involvement in Africa, and its importance is likely to continue as long as Cuba is active in southern Africa. The influence on Cuban foreign policy of Raul, Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, has grown considerably. On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a traditional formulator of foreign policy in the West, finds itself not only subordinated to the military in decisionmaking but also to the Cuban Communist Party's (PCC) Political Bureau and its various geographic departments. In effect, the Foreign Ministry is virtually excluded from the decisionmaking process.

At the national level, the PCC Central Committee is, in theory, the highest policymaking entity in Cuba, but, in practice, it is largely a rubber stamp for the Political Bureau, headed by Castro. The Political Bureau is the heart of the party and of the regime leadership, and from it stem all major policy decisions. The party Secretariat, however, has assumed increasing authority and responsibility since 1970. It has acquired a support structure of more than a

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dozen specialized departments to develop policy options, lay out specific courses of action, and monitor policy implementation by appropriate offices and agencies.

The small group of key Cuban officials who formulate and carry out Cuban policy toward Africa include Fidel Castro; his brother Raul; Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, vice president of the Council of Ministers; Raul Valdez Vivo, the PCC Secretariat member responsible for liaison with foreign communist parties; and Osmani Cienfuegos, former head of the PCC Africa/Middle East Department and currently secretary of the Council of Ministers Executive Committee.

The Evolution of the Angola Decision

It is our judgment that the Cuban leadership did not anticipate a major commitment in Angola. Instead, Havana's involvement evolved through a series of three relatively distinct phases.

--May/June 1975 - a decision for a moderate increase in the number of Cuban military technicians.

--August/September 1975 - a decision to send [] personnel to help the MPLA.

--Late October/early November 1975 - a decision to reinforce with combat troops to confront a South African invasion and successful offensives by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola and the FNLA.

We presume that the decision in May/June 1975 to increase the number of technicians was treated as a fairly routine matter. The issue of sending even a relatively small number of military support personnel to Angola, however, undoubtedly sparked debate in Havana. The following arguments were probably presented by various Cuban officials, with Castro being the final arbiter:

--The technocrats, the strongest opponents to a substantial commitment to Angola, probably contended that the economic costs of such an adventure would be more than Cuba could bear without a

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firm assurance of Soviet recompense. They may also have voiced concern over the strains this commitment might put on Cuban manpower, productivity, and morale. Any direct economic benefits to be derived from assistance to Angola, they probably asserted, would be of little immediate benefit and could have undesirable repercussions, such as setbacks in the Western financial community and damage to the progress of normalization of relations with the United States.

--Other, less cautious officials probably argued that this was an excellent opportunity for Cuba to gain leverage with the Soviet Union. By taking the initiative in Angola with a relatively small commitment, they may have contended, the Cubans would gain increased foreign policy flexibility and have a base of operations for further moves in southern Africa.

--The military most likely pointed out that an Angolan campaign would provide needed combat experience for Cuban troops and would give the Soviets cause to replace Cuba's aging military equipment with more modern arms.

--Other supporters of Castro undoubtedly felt that involvement in Angola would provide an opportunity for Cuba to show some independence of the Soviet Union by taking as active a role in Angola as possible. They also may have argued that the war in Angola provided a good chance to push "the revolutionary line."

Once Castro had listened to the arguments and weighed the other factors involved, he came to the conclusion that the advantages of increased involvement in Angola outweighed the disadvantages. From then on there was no turning back. Cuba moved in decisively, prepared to offer substantial assistance to ensure an MPLA victory.

25X1 Havana dispatched troops when it became evident to both Cuba and the Soviet Union that an MPLA victory could not be attained merely by continuing to pump more Soviet military equipment into Angola. Combat forces were needed that could handle the equipment and perform as cohesive units on the battlefield. In August 1975, Havana decided to send a contingent [redacted] to Angola, not to save Angola itself or black Africa from the invading South Africans--as Havana now claims--but to sway the outcome of an internal African power struggle.

The MPLA was only one part of a three-faction coalition--also including the FNLA and UNITA--technically representing the legal government of Angola. Before 11 November, the date Portugal turned over control of Angola to the MPLA, the Cubans, therefore, had no grounds for claiming they were asked into Angola by a legitimate government.

Havana's decision [redacted] to reassess and restructure Cuban involvement in Angola resulted from a variety of factors. The most basic one was a direct request from the MPLA for increased assistance. Also important was the Cubans' conviction that the US would not make a major military effort to thwart their activities. Cuban decision-makers believed that the United States was too torn apart domestically by the Vietnam experience for Washington to generate support for an African military commitment. They also reasoned that the upcoming US elections posed an additional constraint on such a major commitment.

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The Cuban leaders' serious dedication to worldwide revolution and the cause of "international proletarianism" also played a key role in the Angolan decision. Castro undoubtedly saw his military assistance to the MPLA as a means of enhancing his and Cuba's standing in the Third World as well as burnishing Cuba's revolutionary credentials, somewhat tarnished by Cuban failures in Latin America in the 1960s.

Moreover, the MPLA was a reasonable candidate for aid, given the Cuban policy of supporting viable national liberation movements; in addition, Castro probably felt that it was Cuba's duty to provide the MPLA with enough assistance to

ensure its consolidation of control. Anything less might be regarded by others in the Third World as Cuban betrayal of the MPLA, since if the MPLA's rivals were to triumph, Angola would fall into "imperialist" hands.

There is no hard evidence on the precise Soviet-Cuban relationship at this point--whether Moscow pressed the Cubans into the Angola conflict. Clearly, however, Soviet and Cuban policy interests in Africa were in tandem; by supplying trained and experienced personnel capable of operating Soviet-provided equipment, the Cubans were able to demonstrate their support for overall Soviet policy in Africa. The Cuban leaders most likely concluded that this Cuban involvement would help to ensure a continuation of the Soviet economic assistance upon which Cuba is so heavily dependent, and could induce the Soviets to replace and modernize military equipment in the Cuban inventory.

The military situation in Angola was no doubt another factor in Cuba's decision.

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The first major outbreak of hostilities between the groups vying for control in Angola in March 1975 was most likely initiated by the FNLA, which hoped to seize the initiative on the battlefield. But, bolstered by Soviet arms, the MPLA then launched an offensive to drive FNLA and UNITA forces out of Luanda, leading to MPLA control of the capital by mid-July. A total MPLA victory seemed close at hand.

Foreign allies of the FNLA, however, became alarmed by the upsurge of MPLA fortunes.

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A reinvigorated FNLA, in a drive toward Luanda, took the strategic town of Caxito on 23 July 1975 and the momentum shifted, temporarily at least, to Holden Roberto's FNLA forces.

Finally, there had been concern among the Cuban leadership that the current generation of Cuban youth had not experienced its own "trial by fire," that it had not paid its revolutionary dues. Active involvement in Angola would, it was felt, provide Cuban youth with a previously lacking sense of participation in the revolution; this, in turn, would help guarantee the continuation of the revolutionary process in Cuba.

The Ethiopian Decision

Although Cuba had demonstrated in Angola that it was willing to undertake a major overseas military campaign, the Castro regime's decision to repeat this action in Ethiopia less than two years later took most observers by surprise. While much remains to be learned about the forces that drive and inhibit Cuban military activism, the following paragraphs attempt to outline the reasons we now perceive for Cuba's decision to dispatch troops to Ethiopia. They will seek to answer questions such as: What did Cuba perceive as its basic interests in the area? Did Cuba's intervention in Ethiopia, like that in Angola, represent a convergence of Cuban and Soviet interests? Or was Ethiopia a clearcut case of Havana doing Moscow's bidding? Did Cuba, as in Angola, get drawn gradually into military conflict to protect an initial investment or did the Castro regime opt from the outset for an open-ended commitment?

The Castro regime has consistently rationalized the sending of its troops to Ethiopia on ideological grounds. It interprets the struggle in the Horn of Africa as part of the larger global conflict between the socialist camp and "imperialism" and contends that it came to Chairman Mengistu's defense to prevent the Ethiopian revolution from being strangled in its infancy.

This argument has merit but is not totally persuasive. Havana welcomed the takeover of a leftist government in Addis Ababa in February 1977, seeing this as a significant addition to the spread of radical socialist regimes that it was working to foster in the Red Sea Basin. Even though the ties to Mengistu were newly formed, Fidel Castro clearly

felt a strong personal and ideological affinity with the Ethiopian leader and was greatly impressed with the revolution he was trying to carry out.

Castro's first-hand look at the situation in Ethiopia in March 1977--just six weeks after Mengistu had taken control of the government--had a strong impact on the Cuban leader and reinforced his desire to assist. Even at that early date the Cubans talked of sending troops if the situation became critical.

For the next seven months, however, Castro seemed content to have Cuban military personnel help Mengistu try to consolidate his hold by training a militia force to combat the various insurgencies. This limited role was very much in keeping with Cuban activities in South Yemen and Somalia--the two other countries in the region where Cuba had established a presence.

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Two factors were paramount in leading to the Castro regime's decision to commit combat troops. First, the military situation was becoming critical. Somalia was threatening to capture Harar and Dire Dawa--Ethiopia's remaining footholds in the Ogaden--and the military efforts of the Eritrean separatists had reached a high-water mark. The loss of these regions would have been disastrous to the prestige of Mengistu and would have imperiled his continued rule.

The second crucial factor for Havana was that major Soviet strategic interests were threatened. On 13 November Somalia closed its military facilities to Soviet personnel, thereby depriving Moscow of its window to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean; Moscow's policy toward the Horn of Africa was in a shambles. The Soviets were faced with a situation in which they had been tossed out of Somalia and risked losing potential replacement facilities if Ethiopia became truncated, as appeared increasingly possible.

In Ethiopia, in contrast to Angola, Soviet desires were doubtless a vital--and perhaps a decisive--consideration in Havana's policy calculations. The USSR had substantially more at stake than did Cuba--greater material investment, a vital strategic interest, and the need, as a great power, to salvage its pride. From the beginning of Cuba's involvement in Ethiopia, the Castro government had closely coordinated its actions with the Soviet Union. At every critical juncture in Cuba's deepening involvement, Cuban officials traveled to Moscow to consult. The Cubans' close working relations with the USSR in Ethiopia made it all the more difficult for Castro to turn aside a Soviet request for Cuban combat involvement.

This is not to say that the Cubans were forced into action against their will. Cuba and Ethiopia were linked by leader-to-leader ties and by the Castro regime's genuine commitment to revolutionary solidarity. Like Moscow, the Cuban leadership not only prized Ethiopia as a foothold for radical socialism in a vital strategic area, but recognized that its importance far exceeded that of Somalia because of its much larger population. Moreover, the Cuban leadership was no doubt glad to seek revenge against Somali President Siad, who had not only undermined Cuban attempts to promote a federation of radical states in the region but had then turned to the "reactionary" Arabs and the West for military support. In addition, after the relatively easy victory during the conventional stage of the Angolan war, the Cuban leadership doubtless welcomed the opportunity once again to demonstrate the prowess of its military forces, especially since it believed that Cuban assistance could be decisive.

Havana probably decided from the outset that if it were going to send troops to Ethiopia, a large expeditionary force--on the order of that then in Angola--would be needed.

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For the second time in a little over two years, Cuban troops demonstrated the impact that a relatively small force of highly motivated, well-trained, and well-equipped troops can have on a conventional, set-piece campaign against a large but less professional African army. The importance of the Cuban role was far greater than its size suggests. Despite the fact that only one Cuban division fought in the Ogaden, alongside at least five Ethiopian divisions, the Cuban contribution was decisive in permitting Ethiopia to gain its swift victory.

Outlook

Cuba's military successes in Angola and Ethiopia have convinced the Castro regime that its forces can play a decisive role in the African struggle--the key theater for Cuban activism abroad. The Cubans have been seriously threatened only by the South Africans and then only briefly. The cost so far to Cuba in terms of casualties has apparently been within acceptable limits. We estimate that 1,500 to 2,000 Cubans have been killed in Angola since the fall of 1975, and Cuba may have lost a few hundred men in Ethiopia.

Mounting evidence indicates, however, that continued responsibility in Angola's counterinsurgency effort is not sitting well with Havana. The Castro regime does not seem to be psychologically equipped to handle the slow but apparently endless hemorrhaging resulting from this campaign. Consequently, until recently the Cubans were careful to avoid being saddled with a similar role in the Ogaden against Somali-backed guerrilla groups.

Cuba's military successes have given Armed Forces Minister Raul Castro and his subordinates a greater position of authority from which to argue for continued military activism. The increased influence of the "Raulistas" bodes ill for reducing tensions with the US. Among Cuban elite groups, the Raulistas have retained the most deeply ingrained animosity toward the US and have been the least inclined to alter their behavior in Africa in order to reach an accommodation with Washington.

Cuba's policy of military activism has had political costs, mainly in alienating a number of important nonaligned governments. Some difficulties have also been incurred in its relations with its natural allies--those governments with shared ideologies but competing interests. In Ethiopia, for example, Cuba risks antagonizing Mengistu if it does not cooperate against the Eritrean rebels. By helping to suppress the Eritreans, however, Cuba would jeopardize its ties with important friends among the radical Arab states and tarnish its image among world revolutionaries who believe that the Eritreans are fighting a legitimate liberation struggle.

The Cubans are learning that the nationalistic sensitivities of local leaders such as Mengistu can preclude unfettered Cuban political influence. Nevertheless, despite some serious disagreements with the Mengistu government--especially over the composition of a new ruling party--there is as yet no indication that Havana believes that its troops have shed their blood in vain.

On balance, Cuba has no doubt that the political gains resulting from its military activism far outweigh the costs. When the decade began, Cuba was a pariah in the Western Hemisphere. Even in the Caribbean Basin--where Havana could most naturally expect to project its influence--not a single nation except Mexico had diplomatic relations with the Castro regime. Now Cuba is a force to be reckoned with in international politics; it plays an important role from one end of the African continent to the other, and--as developments in South Yemen indicate--on the Arabian peninsula as well. Cuba has also become a major leader of one camp within the nonaligned movement.

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The thrust of Cuban foreign policy for the foreseeable future has, therefore, been established. Castro is well aware that southern Africa, especially, is passing through a critical stage in its development, and, with an eye to his own place in history, he wants Cuba to play a heavy role in that "liberation struggle." The Cuban leadership has set in motion such a massive propaganda effort to prepare its people for continued sacrifice that only a decisive reversal--probably on the battlefield--would be likely to cause the regime to change course. Although Havana's goal is likely to remain steadfast, it may well be willing to undertake tactical shifts in response to heavy pressure, especially from key nonaligned countries or from the Soviet Union.

The extent to which Cuba can continue to pursue a policy of military activism will depend, of course, upon its own resources. So far the 35,000 to 38,500 Cuban troops serving in Africa account for less than 10 percent of Cuba's military. Moreover, Havana is using Angola and Ethiopia as staging areas for military actions in the surrounding regions and could draw on its forces in those two countries for a variety of military tasks short of full-scale confrontations without having to bring in additional troops from Cuba.

Moscow's willingness to offset the costs of Cuba's military actions abroad will be a crucial determinant for future Cuban activism. The Soviets, in addition to providing the bulk of the military equipment Cuba used in Angola and Ethiopia [redacted]

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[redacted] have also increased its economic aid to Cuba. This year Soviet economic support for Cuba will rise to the equivalent of at least \$2.3 billion in sugar and petroleum subsidies. This figure represents an increase of about 45 percent over last year and is more than triple the 1975 level when large-scale subsidization first began.

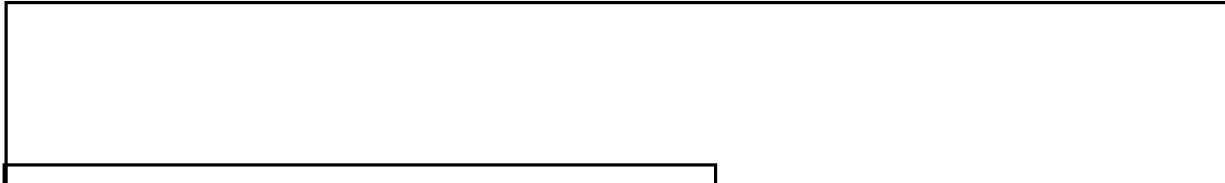
The USSR has also increased its military assistance to Cuba. Since Cuba's involvement in Angola in 1975, Soviet arms deliveries have risen steadily; [redacted]

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Moreover, [redacted] Moscow is helping to modernize and upgrade the Cuban Air Force. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, the Cubans realize that Africa has a lower priority for Moscow than it does for Havana, and the Castro regime doubtless worries that in response to other concerns Moscow may opt for a less aggressive policy in Africa. The Cubans, moreover, have never lost their fear that Washington and Moscow will strike a deal that undercuts Cuban interests.

When it halted its aggressive effort to export its revolution to Latin America in the late 1960s, Cuba showed that it can abandon a policy that seems bound to fail. As long as the Cubans believe "imperialism" is in retreat, however, and that their support can be decisive in aiding the cause of radical socialism, the Castro regime's commitment to "proletarian internationalism" is likely to remain undiminished.

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